CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A contention management apparatus comprising:
   (a) a network;
   (b) more than one MFP connected to the network; and
   (c) a contention controller connected to the network and through the network to the more than one MFP, the contention controller configured to direct output from an MFP in contention to an idle MFP.

2. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the contention controller further includes a database of networked MFPs and a user priority list of MFPs for use when contention occurs.

3. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the contention controller contains a default list of MFPs for use when contention occurs.

4. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the contention controller resides on one of the more than one MFPs.

5. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the contention controller resides on and is manipulated by a PC .

6. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the network is an intranet.

7. The apparatus of Claim 1 wherein the network is the Internet.

8. A contention management apparatus in a network of a plurality of MFPs, the apparatus comprising:
   (a) an intranet network;

(b) the plurality of MFPs connected to the intranet network; and

(c) a contention controller connected to the plurality of MFPs through a connection to the intranet network, the contention controller including a database of networked MFPs and a user priority list of MFPs for use when contention occurs, wherein the contention controller is configured to direct output from any MFP in contention to an idle MFP on the user priority list.

9. The apparatus of Claim 8 wherein the contention controller further includes a default list of MFPs for use when contention occurs.

10. The apparatus of Claim 8 further comprising a plurality of MFPs connected to the Internet and to the intranet network.

11. A system for managing contention between more than one MFP connected in a network, the system comprising a contention controller connected to the network, the contention controller configured to identify MFPs in contention and idle MFPs and to direct output to one or more idle MFPs when contention occurs.

12. The system of Claim 11 wherein the network comprises an intranet.

13. The system of Claim 11 wherein the network comprises the Internet.

14. The system of Claim 11 wherein the contention controller further includes a database of networked MFPs and a user priority list of MFPs for use when contention occurs.

15. The system of Claim 11 wherein the contention controller further includes a default list of MFPs for use when contention occurs.

16. A method for managing contention in MFPs comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a contention controller;

(b) connecting said contention controller to a network;

(c) connecting a plurality of MFPs to said network;

(d) configuring said contention controller to identify MFPs connected to said network;

(e) configuring said contention controller to identify MFPs in contention and idle MFPs; and

(f) directing output of MFPs in contention to idle MFPs by means of said contention controller.

17. The method of Claim 16 wherein the step of connecting to a network further includes the step of connecting to the Internet.

18. The method of Claim 16 further comprising the step of adding user preferences to said contention controller for selection of idle MFPs to which output is directed.

19. The method of Claim 16 further comprising the step of adding default instructions for selection of idle MFPs to which output is directed.

20. A computer-readable medium having computer-readable instructions thereon which, when executed by a computer, perform the steps of Claim 16.